

**AMBASSADOR LEVIN'S OPENING REMARKS**  
**KONINGLIJKE ALGEMEENE VEREENIGING VOOR BLOEMBOLLENCULTUUR**  
**(KAVB)**  
**ROYAL GENERAL BULB GROWERS' ASSOCIATION**

**Friday, January 22, 2010 4:00 p.m.**  
**Museum de Zwarte Tulp**

Mayor, Mr. Breure, Mr. Langeslag, Members of the KAVB, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind invitation to be part of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Koninglijke Algemeene Vereeniging Voor Bloembollencultuur, and to open your special exhibit at this beautiful museum.

I understand that this museum celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, and that it operates only through the good will of many volunteers.

Mr. Breure, congratulations to you and to all your dedicated volunteers on the silver anniversary of the Black Tulip.

The earliest reference I could find to bulb flowers in the United States says that Dutch settlers were growing tulips on Manhattan by 1655.

Since this was less than 30 years after the Dutch purchased Manhattan Island, the first settlers obviously considered flowers a necessary commodity and an indispensable requirement for civilized life.

Ever since then, Americans have associated tulips and other bulb flowers with the Netherlands.

Ask any American to name something Dutch, and they will say windmills and tulips.

As many of you know, my parents were born in the Netherlands and emigrated to the US after WWII.

I was always proud of my Dutch heritage. I have many fond memories of my Dutch-American upbringing.

Growing tulips and other bulb flowers is among the best of those memories. My love of flowers is something I believe I inherited in my DNA.

I have lived in Chicago for many years.

It is one of the “greenest cities” in America, with lots of open space and parkland.

In this way, it is much like many Dutch cities.

One of my favorite spots in Chicago is Millennium Park, which reclaimed unsightly railroad tracks and converted it into a public garden, outdoor concert venues, and sculpture park.

The landscaping was designed by Piet Oudolf, among others, who also landscaped the Battery Park Garden for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Henry Hudson’s voyage.

We had the pleasure of walking through Piet Oudolf’s gardens immediately after the Henry Hudson tulip was unveiled to Prince Willem-Alexander and Princess Maxima in September.

I would be remiss if I did not mention Chicago’s famous “Tulip Days” each spring, when the median strips along Michigan Avenue’s Magnificent Mile are resplendent with hundreds of thousands of tulips.

The reason I am dwelling on my personal experiences is to highlight the strong, long-lasting relationship between the US and the Netherlands. Your industry is a shining example of the spirit of cooperation between our countries.

I am sure that you are familiar with the commercial history of bulb exports to the United States; how in 1849 Mr. J.B. v.d. Schoot traveled to America to sell bulbs.

How in 1922 officials of bulb grower and exporter organizations visited the US Department of Agriculture to resolve pest problems.

How ongoing research in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century allowed the Dutch industry to provide safer and higher quality products.

How in 1923 the bulb industry set up a quality inspection service which later became the Flower Bulb Inspection Service.

Right before I arrived this afternoon I visited one of the finest examples of US-Dutch cooperation – the flower bulb preclearance program in Hillegom.

In August 1951 the Netherlands and the US signed a cooperative agreement establishing a year-round preclearance program.

Officials inspect Dutch bulbs for pests and diseases BEFORE they leave the Netherlands. This eliminates the risk that a shipment will be rejected in the US at great cost to the exporter.

The Dutch flower bulb program is the oldest and one of the largest preclearance programs in all of U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 2009 the US imported \$136 million worth of flower bulbs from the Netherlands, making us your number one customer.

I am very proud that this flagship program will celebrate 60 years of cooperation in 2011.

This trade in bulbs is only one example of why the Netherlands is such an important ally of the US. Because of our good relationship, the trade in products of agricultural, fisheries and forestry origin reached an estimated \$3.3 billion in 2009, ranking the Netherlands number 12 in the list of key agricultural trade partners.

The Netherlands is an important gateway for US agriculture into the European Union. Your country's large, well developed food processing industry transforms US inputs and sends its products to other countries.

The Netherlands accounts for 16 percent of all US agricultural exports to the EU! That is very impressive for a country that has only 3 percent of the EU population.

The Netherlands is a trading nation. Its greatness derives, in part, from the drive of its people to create and expand markets at home and abroad.

The US values the Netherlands' commitment to the principles of free trade.

We appreciate that the Dutch voice in the international arena is one of reason.

One month ago in Copenhagen, the world struggled to conclude an agreement to deal with the greatest threat facing the earth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - Climate change.

This threat does not have any simple solutions; it will take many different actions by everybody to save our planet.

The negotiations were hard, and we are grateful for the leadership and commitment that the Netherlands showed.

Your leaders spoke forcefully on the need to reduce carbon emissions, and recognized that deforestation and agriculture are major emitters of greenhouse gases.

At the same time, your leaders showed their commitment to turning agriculture and forestry into vehicles to mitigate climate change by their support for REDD Plus, (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation), and by becoming a charter member of the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases.

My staff, especially the representatives of USDA, are anxious to proceed with all speed to collaborate with the Government of the Netherlands in REDD Plus and the GRA.

As I return to this afternoon's event, I see that bulb flowers remind us of many things. Not only do they call to mind the beauty of the Netherlands, with field after field of red, yellow and white.

Bulb flowers remind us of the close ties that the Netherlands and the United States enjoy. They are symbolic of the cooperation between our countries and a badge of our shared commitment to making the world a better place.

Thank you for inviting me to share this exhibition opening with you and congratulations!